

3 On Rurality, Rural Development and Rural Sociology

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Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss the concept of rurality. This is not only of scientific interest: the search for a proper definition of rurality that goes beyond former and increasingly inadequate conceptualizations is also of social and political interest. 'Rural development' is acquiring an increasingly prominent position on EU¹ and national agendas.² Meanwhile, growing cities, the urbanization of the countryside, an agricultural sector burdened with problems and the ever present and burning issue of 'areas lagging behind in development' constitute a complex of urgent problems within Europe as a whole. The urgency of these problems and the introduction of the concept of rural development into political discourse³ raises several questions which are far from simple. What, in fact, is the rural? What is the rural we want to develop? And how is the countryside to be moulded given the new claims being articulated by the cities?

In several arenas where Wageningen rural sociologists work⁴ these questions and issues emerge as key-issues on larger agendas. Roughly synthesized it is possible to suggest that the rural today represents a misunderstood, if not an *unknown reality*. There is, as Marsden *et al.* (1990, p. 12) argued, 'a conceptual hiatus.'⁵ It is not clear what we should understand as the rural or what it ought to be. The rural appears to be void as a concept and consequently is a vigorously debated empirical reality. Some argue, for example, that there is no longer any countryside⁶ in the Netherlands and maintain, despite opposition,⁷ that rurality belongs to the past.

Underlying these questions and issues it is possible to discern a second level of complexities: will there be any room in the future for what we currently understand as the rural when nearly every corner of the world is affected and reshaped by processes of globalization? Is it possible, in an epoch of globalization, to shape the rural along politically inspired lines?

Searching for Ingredients and Their Common Denominator

In this chapter I will try to outline some of the ingredients that I believe are essential to the concept of rurality. None of these ingredients is, in itself, decisive to the demarcation of a sharp boundary between the rural and the urban. In combination, however, they constitute gradations that make up the differences between the two. This combination is not a random phenomenon, it is a central denominator. Consequently, I will first discuss the ingredients that, taken together, form the basis for a concept of rurality that bridges past, present and future. Although rurality has many location-specific expressions, which become particularly clear when we use a comparative method (Hofstee 1985b), rurality is above all, as I will argue, *a constant through time*.

Subsequently, I will examine the *basic misunderstanding* of changing rurality, a misunderstanding with specific (urban as well as rural) causes and backgrounds. Finally, I will tackle the most elusive and nebulous of discussions: the issue of rural development in the near future.

It is obvious that any debate on rurality and rural development will involve an assessment of the *raison d'être* of rural sociology. Or to put it in another way, it is through the redefinition of rurality and rural development that the relevance of several elements of the work of Wageningen sociology becomes clear.⁸ In this chapter I therefore comment on some of the work being carried out by the 'Wageningen School.' Thus, this chapter can also be read as a critical review of the 'state-of-the art' of Wageningen rural sociology.

On Rurality as Co-production of Man and Nature

Rurality was once a self-evident notion (Duby 1984, p. 7). Today it is increasingly accompanied by a question-mark. In public debate, the 'rural' is primarily associated with transiency and remoteness. If it ever existed, it is to be located in times far removed from modernity. And if it 'still' exists then it is in some peripheral location, far away. Rurality is where tourists go to discover the counter-image of the city from which they long to escape. Rurality is 'paradise lost': Macondo (Garcia Marquez 1972) or Jorwerd, the village forgotten by God (Mak 1996).

The intriguing aspect is that concerns about the disappearance of villages, the demise of the rural economy and the restructuring of agriculture are not only present-day obsessions. One could return to almost any time-space location and find oneself embroiled in exactly the same discussion. The *disappearance* of the rural or, to be more precise, *fear* of disappearing rurality, seems to be a *constant factor* in recent history. One could also argue that the *persistence* or *reemergence* of the rural is an equally

constant factor. If this were not so, the threat of rural fade-out could not be regretted time-and-again.

Contrary to current trends in the literature, I will not try to situate the specificity of the rural in population density, the relative importance of agriculture, the relative lack of services and facilities or other 'objectified' categories (Huillet 1994; Hoggart *et al.* 1995).⁹ Working with such categories can only produce an image of a disappearing countryside.¹⁰ Equally, such categories frequently frustrate comparative analysis and therefore obscure any basic understanding of the essence of the rural. More importantly, the use of such statistics is at odds with the essence of the question: the way rurality is continually being constructed and reconstructed. Rurality, as I will argue, is the continuously changing result of a many-sided and highly complex social process that is critically dependant on certain specific mechanisms.

What, Then, Is the Essence of Rurality?

The debate as to what constitutes urban and rural identities is probably as old as civilization itself. The continuously changing, opposing, yet combined, constellations known as city and countryside are both products of the process of civilization. Curiously enough, recent scientific and social debate has reduced the discussion of rurality to a one-sided equation in which the rural and the urban become mirror images. As a result, more urbanization cannot but be interpreted as less rurality.

What is missing in today's debates is an awareness that both the rural and the urban are understood as being intrinsically interwoven (albeit differentiated) aspects of civilization. Hence, the rural is not to be defined simply as the opposite of the urban – it is also to be defined in relation to the opposite of civilization, that is, 'wilderness.' The quest for the rural cannot be grounded in one equation alone. Such a quest involves the discussion of two boundaries: the boundary between the urban and the rural, and the boundary between the rural and the non-civilized.

Nature movements in western Europe (especially those in the Netherlands)¹¹ are making us increasingly aware of this latter boundary. Through their claim for a nature unaffected by man (heard most frequently from the more radical sections of the nature movements), the notion of rurality is becoming increasingly embedded in (and defined by) two equations.

It is the transformation wrought by mankind that distinguishes the rural from wilderness. In 'pure' nature there are no people. 'Pure' nature is nature unaffected by man, history or society. This is precisely where it differs from the rural. In the countryside we feel, taste, see and hear man's presence. The rural cannot be conceived of, experienced, or constructed without the presence of man.¹² The rural, then, is the locus *where the co-production*¹³ of man and nature is located. Consequently, rurality as such is both the result and expression of this co-production.

The second boundary, that between the rural and the urban, can now be defined as the next logical step. The urban is the locus where the co-production of man and nature stops. While there may well be 'green elements' in the city, the co-production of man and nature is not essential to cities. This difference might be sharpened if we introduce the notion of a 'living' versus a 'dead' nature. Cities – including amongst other things their associated industries – may well derive resources such as cotton, iron ore, coal and uranium from nature. But they derive these products in the first place as dead material and, secondly, they do not reproduce the nature concerned.

The realm of the rural, by contrast, constantly uses and reproduces 'living nature' (eco-systems, bio-diversity) or, more specifically, cows, fields, woods, crops and dung. This reproduction in particular, appears to be a crucial difference.

Rurality is the ongoing co-production of man¹⁴ and nature. Consequently, the rural does not contain 'pure' nature.¹⁵ The nature embedded in the rural is a co-product, resulting from the interaction and co-evolution of man and nature. It is both the enriched outcome of co-production and the substance for further co-production. The same is true for 'man.' The rural does not contain an abstract society or any society as such. It involves and is built upon a society¹⁶ that is moulded to deal with co-production. In the context of co-production, nature is not purely natural, nor is society purely 'social.' The two are 'contingent' and 'heterogeneous' (Bijker and Law 1992, pp. 8–10). They constitute each other mutually. The one cannot be understood without the other and *vice versa*.

In as far as nature is absent in the urban, the city can definitely be said to differ from the countryside. The urban is society moulded according to organizing principles developed by mankind itself. The need to deal with nature is not present in the urban. Hence, the typical arrangements associated with the co-production of the human and the natural are also absent in the cities.

As far as the rural is concerned, I am using the term co-production in the broadest possible sense of the word. In the first place *co-production* refers to the interaction between man and living nature, that is the process of production in which 'nature' is converted into goods and services for human consumption. Agricultural production is evidently one of the basic components of such co-production. Co-production is, however, not limited to this alone. Man's needs are not limited to food. The notion of co-production refers to a double boundedness: not only does mankind condition co-production, nature also conditions the same co-production. Nature is not, to paraphrase a well-known expression from the school of social-constructivism, as malleable as clay. Nature, especially living nature, imposes its own rules. Just as society does. It is precisely the encounter between the two, nature and mankind, that makes for co-production.

The co-production of man and nature not only involves the immediate process of production, that is the production of goods and services to be consumed. Co-production necessarily implies a strong unity of both production and reproduction (Sevilla Guzman and Gonzalez Molina 1990). Through co-production, the *physical* conditions for the very continuity of the process of production (that is, its reproduction over time) are to be secured. When using a field, the reproduction of soil fertility should be secured, in order to be able to use the field in the next cycle. One has to be sure that a cow has a calf both to secure next year's milk supply and as a replacement for the cow herself if she becomes 'dry.'

Not only must the physical conditions for continuity be secured, the required *social* relations must also be maintained. Hence, co-production as allocated in the rural also implies the reproduction of specific social relations of production. Through this set of relations, not only does the social become organized in a specific way but also nature is moulded into specific forms and patterns. In short, specific social relations (interwoven with the fabric of society at large, but with their own uniqueness) are the main ingredients, if not the central vehicles of rurality.

The Rural: Not Exclusively Agricultural

Rurality is not limited to agriculture alone; it often goes far beyond it. This can be illustrated at various levels. First, one can refer to 'materialized' rurality of, for example, the wide range of landscapes (Meeus *et al.* 1988), and embedded in the natural and cultural values produced through the encounter between society and nature in earlier centuries. The imprint of rurality is omnipresent in at least 80 percent of our territories, if not directly then through the chains that link the present to the past. Then there is culture: the ongoing encounter between man and nature produced (and was supported by) a particular culture in which the prerequisites, the mechanisms as well as the outcomes of co-production are specified and highlighted. Although the concrete expressions of such a culture differ considerably according to their location in time and space, there seem to be some general traits, often misunderstood, but which reappear time and again. Here we might mention, for example, the family as an organizing principle (bridging inter-generational reproduction), continuity, self-sufficiency, self-employment and autonomy, sacrifice, hardship and hard work, as well as the notion of 'doing a proper job.'

Secondly, we have to take into account that the encounter with nature is also basic to such activities as hunting, fishing, forest management, countryside recreation and to living in the countryside. Many colleagues (see for example, Kayser 1990, 1995; Brunori 1994) have documented *repeuplement* or *contro-urbanizzazione*. They made it crystal clear that the movement from town to countryside is directly inspired by the specific values encountered in the rural. Rurality is an interest of society as a

whole. Such an interest evidently is not a residue from the past, but rather becomes more strongly expressed as cities grow and society becomes more urbanized (that is, more distantiated from the rural).

Rephrasing this point in more general terms, one could argue that agriculture (but not only agriculture) produces and also consumes rurality (in as far as farmers use nature, live in the countryside, and so on). However, the *consumption* of rurality (which is evidently related to a positive valuation of rurality) increasingly extends beyond agriculture. *Rurality is equally reproduced* through the *repeuplement* of the countryside, through agro-tourism, through hunting and fishing, and through the consumption of region-specific agricultural produce. At the same time, it is clear that the consumption of rurality is only possible if rurality is also actively produced: the consumption of fossils is something quite different to the consumption of rurality.¹⁷

Thirdly, the basic ingredients of co-production (such as, for example, craft and a certain distantiation from markets) often extend far beyond agriculture. In fact, they move back and fore, often resulting in highly complex if not contradictory constellations. In the 1960s and early 1970s, South American colleagues described the *ruralizacion* of cities – a phenomenon that was rooted in the large *barriadas* that emerged from the rural exodus and where food production for self consumption became a typical feature. However, craft and distantiation from markets (a phenomenon I will analyse later under the heading of 'petty commodity production') were not limited to 'city-gardens.' They overflowed, as it were, into what we now know as the informal sector. We could just as easily draw parallels here with Russia of the 1990s, for example, where it is absolutely unclear whether some 80 percent of the population should be characterized as small peasants or as members of the urban population.

A similar confusion exists in western Europe. Later in this chapter I will discuss such phenomena as part-time farming and the creation of new, non-agricultural small and medium enterprises out of existing agricultural enterprises. Without going further into details, it does not seem to be too risky to hypothesize that rurality is indeed reduced to agriculture alone (and probably even further reduced within the agricultural sector itself) in certain political, economic and ideological conjunctures, whilst under other circumstances the rural is much more extensive in scope. More specifically, one could argue that current processes of rural development, such as we are witnessing throughout Europe today, do in fact imply an expansion of rurality. I will return to this point later.

Dealing with Co-production: Some Specific Ingredients of Rurality

In this section I will analyse some of the elements or ingredients involved in the production and reproduction of rurality. The elements to be dis-

cussed are all related in one way or another to the rural as co-production of the social and the natural. None of these elements are decisive in themselves. Rather the combination and synergy of this whole gamut of features forms the stuff of rurality. It is the differences in the emerging combinations that constitute the dazzling variety of the rural as a concrete expression bounded by time and space.

The Centrality of Craft

Since the co-production of man and nature basically concerns the transformation and reproduction of *living nature* (Toledo 1992), one of its central, although frequently disputed ingredients is *craft*. Specific parts of the eco-systems and the bio-diversity contained in it are transformed (into specific use and/or exchange values) and simultaneously reproduced in and through farming. Hence, diversity, variability and a certain degree of unpredictability are intrinsic to the elements that enter farming as labour objects. During the farm labour process itself, these features are enlarged further – in every cycle of production but also as far as the accumulation of successive cycles of production, that is agrarian history, are concerned. In this respect it is telling that in agriculture, technological development did not narrow the scope of diversity, variability and unpredictability. Rather it enlarged it (van der Ploeg 1990).

The way to cope with diversity, variability and unpredictability intrinsic to the objects of labour is through craft. Through craftsmanship these potentially threatening features are converted into foundations for the production of progress.

The labour process in agriculture is essentially artisanal: it is not and cannot be completely industrialized. Neither can it be completely subsumed to the logic of capital accumulation. The transformation of 'living' nature into specific 'end-products' (milk, honey, potatoes, and so forth) is a process which cannot be wholly forecasted, let alone completely programmed and standardized. The more so since this transformation does not take place in the isolation of a laboratory. Rather it interacts in all sorts of ways with the 'surrounding' and often unpredictable nature. Technically speaking, this implies that *during* the labour process the transformation itself (that is the evolving co-production) should be observed continuously, in order to be interpreted, to be corrected and to be observed again. To put it bluntly: there is *no general rule* for cattle feeding or for fertilizing the land. How a cow is fed depends critically on the *performance* of the particular animal and on the *interrelated* performance of the farmer (that is, on the objectives of the farmer who is feeding her as well as on his interpretation of her reactions). The same applies to a plot of land. Through many years experience the farmer accumulates the knowledge he needs in order to be able to fertilize a *particular* plot of land in the best possible way.

Whilst in industry mental and manual labour have been separated to a considerable degree (Braverman 1974), in agriculture the two remain highly intertwined: the one is nearly impossible without the other. Dealing with nature, in the context of co-production, requires a direct and organic unity of mental and manual labour. Nature is a 'moving target.' The object of labour is continuously changing, developing and becoming more differentiated. It is impossible to ban the associated variance since it would represent a major step backwards in the evolution of co-production. For, in agriculture, knowledge, governance and conscious creation of further variance are crucial to progress.¹⁸

Craftsmanship (the concrete form into which the unity of mental and manual labour is condensed) attributes a specific superiority to the agricultural process of production. That is the capacity to realize, under *ceteris paribus* conditions, better productive results; to avoid unnecessary losses; and to maintain the basis for ongoing endogenous improvements (van der Ploeg and Long 1994; van der Ploeg and van Dijk 1995). This same superiority, together with the capacity to use non-commoditized circuits, which I will discuss later, serves to explain the dominance of the family farm and the artisanal production embedded in it, in most parts of the world. It is only in *loci* defined by sharp political, economic and social inequalities ('imperfections in the markets' as the economists argue), where industrialized forms of agriculture, based on wage labour relations and consequently on a separation of mental and manual labour, are to be found and/or are reemerging.

It is of course possible to introduce organizational schemes, based on a separation of mental and manual labour, into agricultural production. This is the undeniable story of the *haciendas*, the plantations, the capitalist farms (*herenboerderijen*) of the past and 'mammoth-farms' (*mammoetbedrijven*) of today. Three observations are, however, relevant here. Firstly, worldwide comparative data show that under equivalent conditions, peasant and farmers' production are both technically and economically superior to large-scale, capitalist agriculture.¹⁹ Secondly, it is telling that in European agriculture in particular family farming (or petty commodity production) has emerged as the dominant form. Thirdly, craft continually reemerges even in places where it had disappeared for a time.

Craft, as well as the artisanal structure of the labour process in which it is embedded, evinces an almost infinite range of concrete manifestations and is highly variable as far as time and space are concerned. This richness in form is not only due to the encounter with a changing nature. It is also the result of social interests, perspectives and experiences, in short, of the strategies of the actors involved.

Being a highly differentiated capacity, one understands that through craft nature is elaborated into an ever expanding richness. Within the context of co-production, man not only moulds nature into new forms – he or she also moulds nature into a highly differentiated phenomenon that

contains an increased biodiversity. Through a specific organization of space and time, soil productivity for instance is redistributed in such a way that some fields become rich and others become poor (as was the case with the *baldios* in Tras-os-Montes, and the *blue grass fields* and *heather lands* in the Netherlands). As a consequence, new elements were added to the flora and fauna and landscapes were made into highly specific and mutually contrasting constellations.

The same occurred through the continuous reproduction of animals and crops. Over the centuries, cattle selection resulted in a dazzling range of different cows (as is illustrated, for example, in Felius' beautiful encyclopedia of cattle breeds).²⁰ But within each breed there emerges also a relevant heterogeneity. As is illustrated in Groen *et al.* (1993), the cow-as-she-is (including specific genetic features and values) is always the outcome of co-production: she is moulded and therefore made into what she is by the strategic decisions of the farmer. This farmer, of course, does not act as an isolated individual. He or she is linked to specific groups that carry common experiences, insights and knowledge (see Beaudeau 1994)). Those farmers who aim, for instance, at 'a production that is as high as possible with as little labour input as possible' (known in the Netherlands as 'machine men') create different cows to those created by the typical 'cowmen' or 'double goalers.'²¹ This is reflected in the genetic potential for milk production, in the behaviour of the animals, in the strength of the legs, in muscularity and so forth.

Probably one of the most telling illustrations of how nature is moulded and reshaped is to be found in the complex interaction between differentiated breeds and differentiated farming strategies. Dutch fields are stocked by so-called 'red-and-whites' and 'black-and-whites,' animals that represent specific values to the farmers concerned (Maso 1986). The 'blacks' (*zwartbonten*) are the typical milking cows, whilst the 'reds' (or MRY cattle) are a dual purpose breed: apart from milk, they render a considerable quantity of high quality meat. In addition to the livestock there are the farmers themselves, amongst whom we might distinguish for example the typical 'cowmen' from 'double goalers.' The latter orient their farming activities to both milk and meat production, while for the former, only milk production matters. They want to 'see as much milk as possible from every animal in the milking glasses' (see Roep *et al.* 1991).

The distribution of 'reds' and 'blacks' on the one hand, and of 'cowmen' and 'double goalers' on the other, is for historical reasons not parallel. Some cowmen work with 'reds' and some double goalers do have to operate with 'blacks,' which is, at first sight, a somewhat unhappy marriage. Table 1 (derived from Groen *et al.* 1993; see also van der Ploeg 1994a) provides us with some insight into the outcome of this complex encounter between different strategies and different breeds.

Table 1 The Differentiated Development of Milk Type and Dual Purpose Cows within Different Farming Styles

	Development of milk cows		Development of muscles	
	M	D	M	D
Double goalers	96,2	98,6	104,3	102,6
Cowmen	99,4	99,8	101,8	100,7

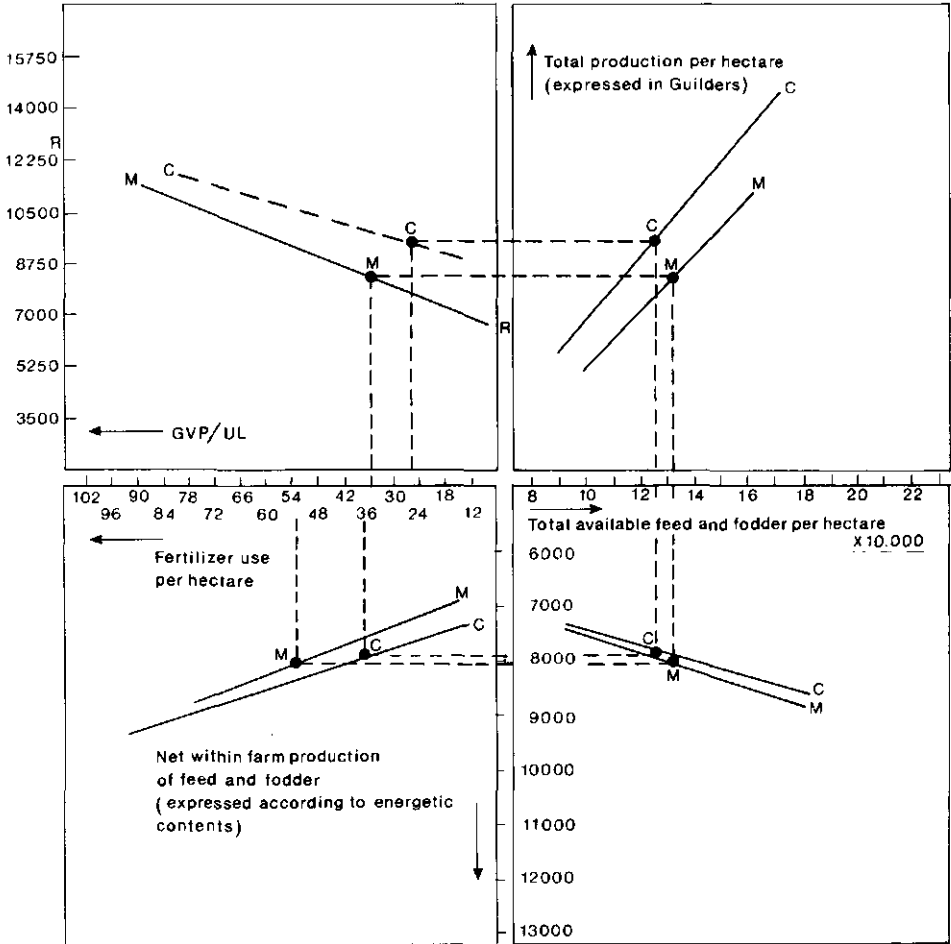
All values in the columns are significantly different ($P < 0.001$, chi square test; M stands for milk type cattle, D for dual purpose cattle)

As the table shows: cowmen build their cattle (even when these are dual purpose cattle) into good milking cows. The overall score for 'development of milking cows' amongst cowmen is significantly higher than the one realized by the double goalers. However, these double goalers rebuild their cattle (through interlinked breeding decisions over time) into good dual purpose cattle, even if they have to do this with 'blacks.' Whatever the genotype (M or D), they realize the highest breeding values for muscularity. This implies that it is not the genetic potential as such, but the interaction between cattle and breeders, in other words co-production, that makes cows into what they are.

Through the ongoing moulding and remoulding of their fields, their cattle, and so on, farmers create, through their craft, entire productive systems characterized by specific interrelations, regularities, potentials and limitations. Productive systems cannot be understood as the more or less progressive unfolding of 'nature' (and/or of the biological, physical and chemical 'laws' this entails). Productive systems as a whole are also the outcome of co-production and of a highly *differentiated* co-production at that. This important point can be supported with an analysis of input/output relations as contained in processes of production. This is summarized in the four-diagram representation (Figure 1). The first diagram (left/below) refers to the conversion of nutrients into fodder, that is: to grassland production. The second diagram refers to the interrelations between farm and feed market: it shows the extent to which the fodder, as produced on the own farm, is supplemented with feed and fodder bought on the market. The third represents the byre and relates to the conversion of the total amount of feed and fodder available into milk and meat.

In the interlinked diagrams two sets of lines (representing specific input/output relations) are introduced. These lines refer to the 'regularities' created by cowmen (C) and machine men (M). Taken together the I/O ratios of the cowmen comprise a specific productive system. The same goes for the I/O ratios created by the machine men (see for further details: NRLO 1994).

Figure 1 A Four-Diagram Representation of the Practices of Cowmen and Machinemen (Source: NRLO 1994)



All over the world, agriculture is characterized by different 'farming systems.' Even within a quite limited space, one can often encounter an impressive variety. As Figure 1 illustrates, this heterogeneity at the material level (at the level of fields, yields, nutrient-inputs, animals, I/O ratios, and so on) is the *co-product* of the strategically organized labour processes of farmers, who through their specific and diversified crafts make agricultural 'systems' into what they are. Through co-production and craft, farmers (and through farmers the societies in which they are embedded) *materialize*, as it were, into the hard core of the rural: in fields, in landscapes, in cattle, in productive systems, in I/O ratios, in differentiated levels of pollution (Schuthof, *et al.* 1994; Roep and Roex 1992), and in specific products (Pohlman 1993; Roep *et al.* 1995). Rurality is to be understood not only at a symbolic level as an outcome of co-production, the rural is also the material (co-)product of this highly differentiated and complex co-production.

Figure 1 is also telling in another respect. One might wonder why the group of farmers who are defining themselves as 'machine men' (M) realize partial and overall I/O ratios that are considerably below those realized by their collages (C). They know quite well how cowmen organize their practices, the details are no secret. The answer emerges as soon as the specific strategy of these machine men is projected into the fourth diagram (left/upper). Whilst cowmen consider the surplus per milking cow to be the most important indicator in analyzing and evaluating their own performance as well as the performance of others, machine men are much less interested in such indicators. For them the associated practices represent a waste of time: 'You loose time because you dedicate too much of it to an individual cow.' They are more interested in large volumes. Central to their strategy is the production of as much as possible with as little labour input as possible ('without losing time'). Hence the total Gross Value of Production (GVP) per unit of labour (UL) emerges as the central indicator. If this criterium is now introduced into the fourth diagram, it shows that precisely through their specific practices in the fields, markets and byres, they realize a score on GVP/UL that is considerably higher than that of the cowmen. If we were to introduce 'surplus per milking cow' as the main criterium, then the picture would be entirely different. Once again: farmers mould 'the material' (here a farming system as a whole) in such a way that it is reshaped according to their insights, experiences, needs and perspectives.²² They get what they want, although not directly. In between the 'aims' and 'the results' is the material, the 'non-human.' Neither the 'human' nor the 'non-human' can be understood here in isolation. *It is the co-production in which the two are engaged and through which they are interlinked, that attributes identity, specificity and significance to both the 'human' and the 'non-human.'*

In agricultural science in general, attention is focused exclusively on the 'non-human.' In so doing, considerable parts of the rural (even a con-

siderable part, if not all of the empirically existing productive systems *in sensu stricto*) are converted into 'unknown realities,' if not straightaway into *unknowable realities*. Without, for example, the fourth diagram (that condenses the goal-oriented behaviour of the farmers concerned) the other three diagrams are converted into a world inhabited by lunatics, laggards, traditionalists or God knows what. Without the 'fourth diagram,' one does not understand why in the fields and byres of machine men (M) I/O ratios are realized which, as such and taken in isolation, are 'too low.'

The same is also true of social sciences as applied to agriculture and the countryside. Generally speaking, they focus only on the 'human' part of the co-production equation. This makes the described ('partial') realities and the institutions and cultural patterns they contain seem somewhat 'strange' to say the least.

I would argue that in Wageningen Sociology, the two – the 'human' and the 'non-human' – are systematically combined, explored and analysed. Hence our 'obsession' with yields, fields, cows and manure (see Bolhuis and van der Ploeg 1985; Hofstee 1985a; Groen *et al.* 1993; Schuthof *et al.* 1994). Our 'obsession' is shared by many of our colleagues from what one might call the 'non-human' departments of our university (Almekinders, Fresco and Struik 1995; Steenhuisen Piters 1995; Beaudeau 1994; Ubels and Horst 1993). It is an 'obsession' reflecting a basic understanding of, and a far-reaching interest in, the co-production of man and nature. As such, it is an expression *avant la lettre* of what is now emerging as social constructivism (Knorr-Cetina 1996; Latour 1994; Callon 1986). Simultaneously, it must be said that at this particular juncture our weakness also becomes clear. Others, including Knorr-Cetina, Latour and Callon were required to understand the full scope and significance of the work we were and are doing in Wageningen.

Extending Craft to Other Domains

Two additional considerations are needed here. The first is that craft-dependent superiority as contained in farming is often extended to non-agricultural domains. Sometimes there are direct interlinkages, as Bagnasco (1988) describes for the Italian *mezzadri* who used their craftsmanship, entrepreneurship and capacity to enrol in actor-networks, to build what is now recognized as the vital small and medium industry in Emilia Romagna and Tuscany. The organic unity of mental and manual labour and associated capabilities are transferred to other economic domains (such as ceramics, metal and machine industries, clothing, transport, and food processing), in order to reestablish, in a different setting, the superiority stemming from craft.

The second observation is that the relevance of craft sometimes extends far beyond the rural as such. The rural is linked to the urban through the provisioning of food, for example. Food is not just a commodity that is simply interchangeable with any other commodity. It is not only price that

governs the flow of this particular commodity called food. Consumers expect safety, quality and/or specificity. Hence, the flow of food is embedded in expectations, norms, symbols, knowledge and ignorance. As Ventura and van der Meulen (1994) have demonstrated, this makes for particular *food chains*: circuits characterized by specific interfaces, where processes of information and feedback, in short, processes of knowledge-sharing link production and consumption.

The artisanal production of food increasingly represents an urban interest. It is associated with food produced in a genuine way. It represents the opposite of industrially transformed food. And the more industrially manipulated food becomes entangled in the one food scandal after the other, the more this urban interest becomes one of the foundations for reinforcing the typical rurality we are discussing here.

Is *craft* to disappear (Reuvekamp 1997)? And is the artisanal organization of the agricultural labour process as one of the strategic vehicles of rurality to disappear as well? I do not think so. What is expressed in and through *craft* is precisely *human capital*. Agriculture today, especially in western Europe, is a knowledge-intensive branch *par excellence*. It is therefore extremely dependent on human capital, that is the capacity to master co-production.

When this human capital becomes valorized through the new markets that are emerging because of an increased social interest in the rural (as, for example, the markets for high-quality produce, and for nature and landscape preservation), it is highly probable that we will see a revival of craft and consequently a strengthening of rurality (see also Brunori 1994).

On the Family Farm, Self-Employment and Freedom

All labour processes are embedded in and constituted by particular social relations of production. The artisanal organization of farming is rooted in a particular set of social relations of production, that is in small-scale family farms or in more analytical terms in petty commodity production.²³ *Essential to petty commodity production (PCP) is that it is linked to the markets as well as distanced from them.* It is precisely this combination that allows for the realization of craft. Hence, the family farm is, just as craft, an essential mechanism through which rurality is produced. The association of the rural and the family farm is so close, that the latter even emerges as one of the essential traits of the former.

Craft presumes a certain autonomy: the interrelations within the process of production as well as the elements constituting it are to be ordered, combined, structured and developed further according to the insights, needs and perspectives of the actors involved. Here one might include 'living nature' as one of concerned 'actors': soil fertility, animals, and biodiversity also have to be reproduced over time and sustainability must be secured. This can only be done by following the intrinsic rationale of

co-production itself. The organization of the labour process, both in the short and in the long term, is to be distanced from the logic dominant in the market.

Through PCP, that is through the actively created distancing of farming *vis-à-vis* the markets (both the input and output markets), a direct submission of farming to and, consequently, a structuring of the process of production according to the logic of the markets, can be avoided (Friedmann 1980, 1986). As has been shown in a range of studies (Bolhuis and van der Ploeg 1985; Long *et al.* 1986; Benvenuti *et al.* 1989; Wiskerke 1997; Leeuwis 1989; van der Ploeg 1987, 1990; de Haan 1994), western European farming is indeed actively distanced from these markets. As far as the markets for land, machine services, capital, cattle, feed and fodder, labour and plant material, for example, are concerned, European farming embodies only a *partial* market dependency. A complete commoditization of all factors of production and non-factor inputs is actively avoided albeit in a variable way.

Wherever possible, the same is true as far as the interrelation between farming and output markets is concerned (Kerkhove 1994; Wiskerke 1997). Commodity relations as entailed in the markets do not therefore penetrate into the heart of the production process. They are, as it were, kept away from the domains of production and reproduction. In this way, farmers create the room for manoeuvre (Long 1984) which allows them to organize farming according to their own strategies, thus make rurality into a phenomenon that not only reflects market conditions but also a much wider (and more complicated) array of driving forces. They create, to put it succinctly, room for craft.

Analytically speaking, PCP and the family farm are not identical. In the rural economy, as an empirical phenomenon, the two generally overlap. The family farm is the dominant 'carrier' of PCP. The stability of the family farm not only rests in the superiority to be derived from the craft it entails and reproduces. It is also firmly embedded in a particular cultural context, in 'rural culture,' that stresses the need to encapsulate property in the family (in the *domus*) and regulates the use of labour according to a specific 'moral economy' (see Friedmann 1986; de Haan 1994, but also the older work of Arensberg and Kimball 1948). If there is any Achilles heel as far as rurality is concerned, it can probably be located in this specific cultural context.

Many contemporary discussions highlight the relative decline of agriculture within the *rural* economy and this is subsequently represented as indicative of deruralization.²⁴ One important question is, of course, whether the rural economy can be equated with agrarian economy and, on a more empirical level, whether agriculture ever has been the only economic activity in the countryside. Even more important is the question of whether or not certain intersectoral changes in the rural economy refer to a qualitative transformation that allows for a conclusion in terms of

definitive deruralization. Through a myopic fixation on the *number* of farms, the most central issue is overlooked. For despite all quantitative changes, the *structure* of the rural economy, as defined by PCP, remains basically the same. It is certainly remarkable that within some fifty years nearly 50 percent of all farms have disappeared. However, it is equally remarkable that the remaining enterprises are structured according to the same principles that have characterized the rural areas for many centuries! Probably it is even more telling that all kinds of *new* activities (such as ecological farming, agro-tourism and small non-agricultural enterprises), involving a range of *new* actors, incorporate the same principles. Hence, it is also in and through the search for self-employment that the family farm and PCP are continually being recreated.

Between 1850 and 1957 the level of employment in Dutch agriculture rose from some 300,000 full-time labour equivalents to more than 670,000. This period coincides with the big boom in Dutch agriculture. This continuous increase in both the quantity and quality (craft) of labour expressed itself in an ongoing intensification of agricultural production (Bieleman 1992).²⁵ The number of farms expanded more than employment data suggest. From 1957 onwards, the level of agrarian employment began to decrease reaching about 250,000 by the mid-1990s. From the 1970s onwards, it is significant that the number of farms decreased faster than total agrarian employment.

In short, tendencies change and will continue to change. It is telling that today the possibility of reaugmenting agrarian employment is again being discussed seriously (see van Depoele 1996; van der Ploeg and van Dijk 1995; Saraceno 1996b). What remains constant, despite the tidal waves that roll over the countryside, is a basic organizational principle: the unity of the family farm and PCP.

In many analyses, petty commodity production (PCP) is represented as a remnant of the past (see, for example, Bernstein 1977). This is, I believe, an incorrect representation. One cannot deny the fact that the 'family enterprise' is a social construction that emerged from a long historical process of emancipation and socio-political struggle. If one goes back to the first farm accountancy records available – in the Netherlands these date from the late sixteenth century – one notes the extreme dependency of the farm on external markets both on the input and at the output side of the enterprise (van der Ploeg 1995a). 'Own resources' were scarce and so were possibilities to control them. The family farm as we know it today eventually emerged as the result of a long historical process: that is a farm mainly, though not exclusively, built on resources owned, used and controlled by the farming family itself. This process accelerated in the period 1880–1930, taking the form of 'repeasantization.'

Slicher van Bath (1978), the well-known agrarian historian, identified important keys to the analysis of this long-term process. Among these, the notion of 'freedom' is strategic in the history of farming. Slicher van Bath

distinguishes between what he calls 'freedom from' and 'freedom to.' 'Freedom from' refers to the absence of (political, economic, class and market) relations that harness and drain the family farm economy. Heavy dependency on external markets – especially as far as the factor and non-factor input markets are concerned – can have an asphyxiating effect here. A certain autonomy can be gained through the creation of one's own resource set (cf. van der Ploeg 1995a). Once established, such a set of resources allows a certain 'freedom from' which, in turn entails a 'freedom to': it becomes possible to operate in a way that closely corresponds with the interests, insights and prospects of the actors involved.

In current economic theories, the farm enterprise is essentially represented as the meeting point of technologies and markets. Taken together, markets and technology *determine* the way of farming. Farmers might deviate from the 'optimum' as entailed in (and defined by) current market relations and technologies, but if they do they cannot avoid marginalization in the long run.

One of the important contributions of Wageningen rural sociology is its theoretical and practical critique of this deterministic paradigm and the subsequent elaboration of petty commodity production as a socially reproduced phenomenon crucial for the rural. The strategic mechanisms through which rurality is produced and reproduced, have been brought to the fore, analysed and highlighted. Farm enterprises are actively *distantiated* from markets by, for example, the creation of a set of *own* resources, whose mobilization, use and reproduction is *not* governed by commodity relations. If this were not the case Dutch agriculture as a whole would be materially impossible.²⁶ At the same time it has been shown that farm enterprises are actively *reoriented* at other markets (Kerkhove 1994; Broekhuizen and Renting 1994; Wiskerke 1997; Broekhuizen *et al.* 1997). And as far as technology is concerned, a range of contributions show that it is constantly being deconstructed, remoulded and recombined with internal elements (van Bentum 1995; Leeuwis 1993; Vijverberg 1996). Empirical studies realized along these lines, almost inevitably centre on agency, strategies, and networks.

Markets and the supply of new technologies constitute important frames of reference for farmers. But it is through the knowledgeable and goal-oriented creation and reproduction of petty commodity production that farmers create the room for manoeuvre required for the co-production in which they are involved. Consequently, different positions *vis-à-vis* the markets and the supply of technologies are created. In the Wageningen research tradition these different positions are understood as different farming styles.²⁷

Cultural repertoire is decisive for the elaboration and materialization of such farming styles. Inspired by Hofstee (1946, 1985a), an important part of the Wageningen research tradition focuses on this cultural repertoire and its role in agriculture. Excellent overviews of the development of this

tradition have been elaborated by de Haan and Nooij (1985), and more recently by Nooij (1996). De Haan's (1994) analysis of cultural repertoire as regulating the intergenerational reproduction of farms and farming families, de Bruijn's (1997) analysis of the complex interface between farming and agricultural policy, and Wiskerke's (1997) analysis of different development trajectories in arable farming demonstrate, in my view, the relevance of culture especially in *today's agriculture*.

The Sack of Potatoes Reconsidered

From local cultural repertoires to Karl Marx might appear, at first sight, a gigantic step. Nonetheless, Marx was evidently right when he characterized peasants as a 'sack of potatoes.' Unfortunately, the 'dialectics' of this statement were subsequently misunderstood. Attention has focused on the 'potatoes,' the image of the peasantry as an unorganized mass of atomized individuals, whilst 'the sack' or the interlinking and uniting element has been neglected. All peasant societies, and the same goes for farmers' communities, involve a balance of autonomy and dependency. Both the 'potatoes' and the 'sack' are present.

Petty Commodity Production implies relations of cooperation and competition. That can be seen in big 'international commodity complexes' (Friedmann 1980); in 'systems in which technical and manufactured inputs are incorporated into a labour process in which commodities are produced, processed and marketed in distinctive industrial structures' (Buttel and Goodman 1989, p. 87); it is also the case in the Peruvian Highlands (Bolhuis and van der Ploeg 1985), and in horticultural production in Dutch glasshouses (Vijverberg 1996). In short, the different forms and expressions of PCP are always interlinked – albeit through different mechanisms. The local cultural repertoire, specifying such crucial notions as trust, progress, and the value of work, is evidently one of these mechanisms. Observers such as Iacoponi have incorporated these mechanisms into their work, but extend the analysis simultaneously to other mechanisms as well. All these unifying mechanisms together constitute what Iacoponi (1996) and others, including Saccomandi (1991) and Brunori (1994), refer to as 'rural districts.'

The phenomenon of 'rural districts' is especially interesting because it also refers to interlinkages that go beyond the farm enterprises as such. They make visible all those interrelations that were forgotten when 'study of the agricultural became divorced from the rural' (Marsden, Lowe and Whatmore 1990, p. 6). Within these 'districts,' farms are linked to a range of other economic units, not only with other agrarian units but also to non-agricultural forms of PCP. Consequently, many of the indicated interrelations are embedded in frames of reference that go beyond immediate market relations.²⁸

Another set of interlinkages is found in the well-known phenomenon of pluri-activity: when farming people engage in more than one, some-

times even in a multitude, of activities. An estimated 30 percent of all farm families in the Netherlands derive their income from agricultural activities alone. In the remaining 70 percent the husband or wife generates income from extra-agricultural activities (de Vries 1995). This extra farm income amounts to an average of more than 20,000 guilders per year on dairy farms and can be compared to the average farming income of 60,000 guilders.

Three additional observations are relevant in this respect. First, we should note that pluri-activity often represents a consciously constructed *nexus* that allows the continuation of farming, on the one hand, and the reproduction of other economic activities on the other hand, which would be impossible if they had to be grounded on stable and full-time employment relations. The post-Fordist type of industrialization in particular is, in many areas, dependent on the typical features of the countryside (Marsden *et al.* 1990). Second, farm families increasingly develop new kinds of pluri-activity located *on* the farm. The development of agro-tourism, farmers' interest in landscape and nature conservation, the on-farm transformation of raw material into high quality products, or the revival of off-farm commercialization (see, for a recent overview, Broekhuizen *et al.* 1997), can all be seen as new activities linked to and located on the farm which allow for a broadening and diversification of economic activity. These are, we might say, newly constructed forms of pluri-activity. Currently, farming women are emerging as a particularly strong force in these new types of pluri-activity (de Rooij, Brouwer and Broekhuizen 1995).

In the third place pluri-activity is likely to become even more significant in the near future. Expected changes in the EU Common Agrarian Policy, the increased influence of farming women in decision making concerning farm development, and the emergence of new rural markets all point in this direction (Saraceno 1996b). 'New sacks' are being found for old, and often misunderstood 'potatoes.'

Petty commodity production, artisanal labour process and cultural repertoire, constitute some of the decisive mechanisms through which the rural is produced and reproduced. These are mechanisms that imply *agency*. They are also mechanisms that constitute some of the decisive links between the local and the global. Farmers obtain a certain control ('a freedom to,' as Slicher van Bath would argue) over the process of production through PCP. This relative control over the process of production and the resources used in it, allows for the development of craft. Through PCP and craft, the process of production can be manipulated according to the (variable) needs, insights, interests, prospects and knowledge of the actors involved. PCP and craft enable the organization of the fields, market relations and the byre (see again Figure 1), according to the 'fourth diagram.' Consequently, it is inherent to PCP and craft as well as to the implied cultural repertoire, that there *are different ways to*

construct the rural (Jollivet 1988; Marsden *et al.* 1992; Roep *et al.* 1991; Leeuwis 1993). Heterogeneity (as expressed in a range of farming styles) is, therefore, not an additional phenomenon. Heterogeneity is intrinsic to rurality.

Heterogeneity is quite often managed by farmers and peasants as an element of the cultural capital of the countryside. The conscious creation of heterogeneity is not only found at the level of fields, cows and accountancy records (and consequently observed, interpreted and used for the production of progress); it is also entailed in and expressed by wide range of different farming styles. This (empirical) range is used increasingly (through comparative analysis) to explore ways out of the problems confronting the farming sector. In this way issues such as employment in farming, income levels, the role of women, innovativeness, the reduction of ammonia emission, landscape preservation and so on, have been addressed (van der Ploeg 1994b).

Finally, I should like to stress that PCP – and the control over the process of production embedded in it – is not simply an analytical model. In everyday life, it is closely bound to a particular culture. It represents, for the actors involved, a 'line of defence' that allows a (re)modelling of economic activities corresponding, at least potentially, with own interests. It is also a pattern that allows for the creation and the maintenance of self-employment. If this were not the case, it would be impossible to understand why the 'small farm enterprise' not only persists but also reemerges time and again all over the world.

On Agency, Locality, Globalization and Relocalization

Following Long (1996), it can be argued that there is little new in the notion of globalization in as far as it refers to the internationalized flow of commodities, ideas, images and people. This is not only true for the Dutch cities that once constituted centres of imperialism – it is equally true for dominated or 'peripheral' zones. The first available farm accountancy records in the Netherlands were made by Hemmema and date from 1569–1573 (see Slicher van Bath 1958 and van der Ploeg 1995a). These records provide information about commodity flows entering and leaving the farm, and show that there were contacts with regions in eastern Europe and the Far East. Grain came from eastern Europe, and cattle from a variety of European countries. Labour was recruited beyond the boundaries of the country. The output, consisting of a wide variety of products, was exported everywhere. Hemmema's farm can only be understood in terms of the *international* context in which it was enmeshed. This enmeshment entered also into the 'poetry' of life: Hemmema and his contemporaries used medicinal herbs from the Mediterranean and we still owe a beautiful part of our flora to it – the *stinzenplantenflora*: the plants that grow in the gardens of old country houses, abbeys and farms.

Relatively speaking, these commodity flows were very important and the notion of the free-floating commodity – whether it was hay, manure, cows, land, capital or labour – was far more generalized than it is today. It may be argued that some commodity flows have increased relatively. And it may be true that the rhythm, and the sometimes dizzy speed with which goods, services, and people move around the globe, have also increased enormously. However, it is difficult to understand how these relative shifts could ever constitute a major qualitative shift towards a 'globalized' world that is definitely different from the 'previous one' (as Bonnano *et al.* 1994 have suggested, for example).

Globalization does exist, but I would suggest that it is found at another level of complexity: that is, in the construction and amplification of expert systems which are fundamentally and completely *disconnected* from place and time. Let me first illustrate my argument and then try to link it to the discussion on rurality.

The example, derived from van Dinten (1996), concerns two local cooperative banks, one in Schagen, a small village in North Holland, the other in Venlo, a 'small town in the South. 'The banking enterprise underwent,' so van Dinten argues, 'far-reaching changes.' The introduction and the use of systems is by far the most important one. Systems do not differentiate according to place and time. As soon as banks start to express themselves through systems, the difference between the autonomous local bank in Schagen and the autonomous local bank in Venlo fades away. If these banks are willing to articulate their differences, then they have to offer what the people in Schagen and Venlo recognize as belonging to them, what they see as typical for their own place. But as soon as a bank defines itself in terms of systems '... a local bank is nothing more than another place where customer and system are coupled' (pp. 100–101; my translation).

Systems are constructed sets of representations, rules, arrangements and procedures. Systems render solutions. Systems are formalized, the rules and procedures are explicit. Systems have their own language: system language. Above all, systems are disconnected from specific situations: they are generalized sets of rules, representations and procedures. The creation and use of these 'system[s] of technical accomplishment [and] professional expertise that organize large areas of the material and social environments in which we live today' (Giddens 1990, p. 27) has far-reaching consequences: one implication is an *adieu* to locality. On the intellectual level, the indicated expert-systems imply an *Aufhebung* (a 'dialectical annihilation') of place and time; on the material level, they make place and time as specific notions totally irrelevant. Agency is also eliminated, or at the best delegated to a second level of importance. Whether you ask for a loan in Schagen or in Venlo, the conditions will be the same. There is no room for negotiation either in Venlo or in Schagen: systematized rules are the same wherever the banking system operates.

Agriculture as a range of interlinked social practices has become increasingly 'systemized,' as a series of Wageningen studies have argued (Benvenuti 1982, 1990; van der Ploeg 1987).²⁹ That is the real 'globalization,' although it has been demonstrated that this same 'systematization' of the world also provokes counter tendencies: that is, new trends towards relocalization (van der Ploeg 1992).

Relocalization is found everywhere: PCP, craft and districts are used as *lines of defence* (Darré 1985; Dupré 1991).³⁰ They are not only the outcome of the encounter between globalizing tendencies and the rural, they are also used to recreate space to deal in a more adequate way with co-production. At stake here is the already discussed 'superiority' of the rural, which now includes such new dimensions as the number of black-tailed godwits per square kilometre, as well as the ever-present struggle between town and countryside over the (re)distribution of wealth produced in the countryside.

By running the world according to designed systems, we increasingly reshape it according to those systems. The question is, of course, whether the 'real lifeworld' will accept and/or endure this. It might seriously be asked, echoing Polanyi (1957), whether 'systemizing' the world according to universal rules and procedures, which make time-and-space-locations completely interchangeable, would not be 'tantamount to annihilating the world.'

Seen historically, the emergence of the 'family farm' or PCP, represents a process of relocalization opposed but nevertheless linked to tendencies towards globalization. Farming (and other rural activities) could only be continued and strengthened through the localized control and use of local resources³¹ (of whatever kind). Or, to put it more bluntly, it is through actively constructed relocalization that a strong position in globalized markets can be gained and materialized.³² Hence, *rurality is a constellation in which agency matters* and probably in a decisive way. The rural is certainly a locus that 'allows' for agency and this is part of its attractiveness.

Whatever definition of rurality we use, the specificity of time and place and hence of the actors involved must be stressed. Van Dinten (1996) quotes the Austrian social geographer Brugger: *Heim is dort wo man Ursache von etwas ist*. This beautiful, almost untranslatable expression clearly refers to both the specificity of space and the centrality of agency.

One cannot of course say that agency is irrelevant in the cities. But, as I have argued throughout this chapter, *rurality is constructed and reconstructed in such a way that agency matters*. This is so, not for any teleological or ontological reason, but because trends towards annihilating the specificities of time and place, especially in the countryside, produce strong responses to relocalize. The countryside, especially today, is the meeting point of two opposing tendencies. A new rurality will emerge from the complex interactions and conflicts between globalizing systems

and the particularity of the rural. Or perhaps we should say: a range of new ruralities yet to be discovered.

Times are A'Changing

The countryside, as a socio-economic constellation as well as physical space, is continually changing. Rurality, however, is a *constant* through time. One could argue that change is an intrinsic aspect of co-production. As both the outcome and the 'substance' of co-production, the countryside is subjected to a triple dynamic. First, society changes and therefore rurality as the co-production of society and nature changes. Second, nature changes and therefore the rural also changes. And third, the mechanisms, scope and reach of co-production itself change continuously, leading therefore to both new social arrangements and new nature, in short, to changes in the rural.

Perceptions of the rural are also changing. The same goes for the criteria to assess whether there is 'progress' or 'regression.' It is telling, for instance, that a decrease in the rural and more especially of the farming population, has for centuries been seen as an indication of crisis (see Slicher van Bath 1960), whilst after the second world war, a similar decrease was regarded as a precondition for progress.

The mid-1950s mark the beginning of an epoch in which, at least in Europe, a far-reaching project for the 'modernization' of the rural was developed.³³ For many of the actors involved, this modernization project implied a definite end to rurality: the countryside was to be aligned to the cities. The urban-rural continuum would fade away. The notion of the rural was, indeed, adapted and readapted, as Mathieu (1990) demonstrates in his interesting review. 'Parity' became the rule as far as income levels in town and countryside were concerned and, probably even more important, with the calculation of income levels came the definitive abstraction of PCP reality. The agricultural entrepreneur (the farmer understood as a definitive step beyond the peasant of the past) was supposed, in the process, to become equal to urban entrepreneurs, able to dispose of the same balance between work and leisure (Eizner 1985), having the same attitudes towards risks, credit and the management of an enterprise, and behaving in daily life in the same way as every other citizen.³⁴ Craft, as one of the central mechanisms and capacities characterizing the rural economy, was to make way for new technologies allowing for an accelerated 'industrialization' of the agricultural process of production. 'Management by exception' would become the new rule. The same applied to the basic organizational arrangement, the family farm (de Haan 1993). New arrangements, such as the GAEC (cooperation between farmers) announced in the Mansholt Plan, would dominate.

Figure 2 The Modernization Project as Perceived in the 1960s

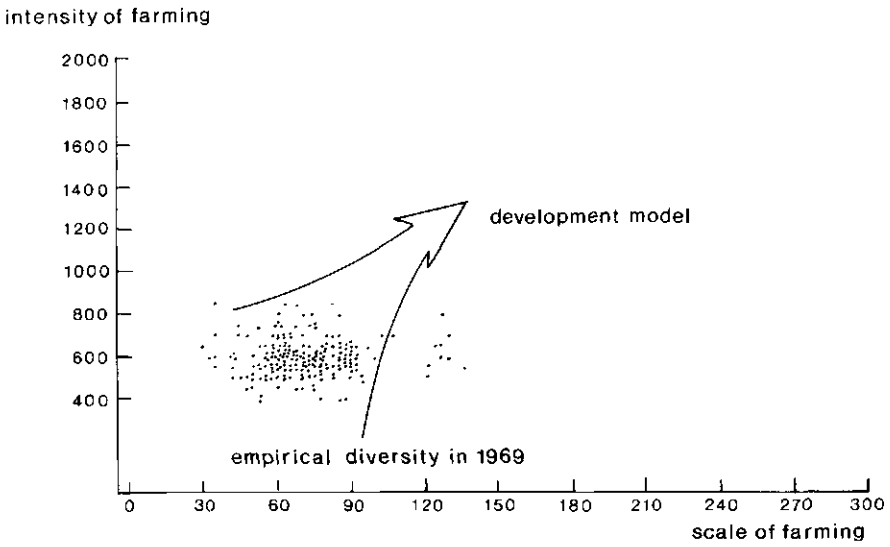
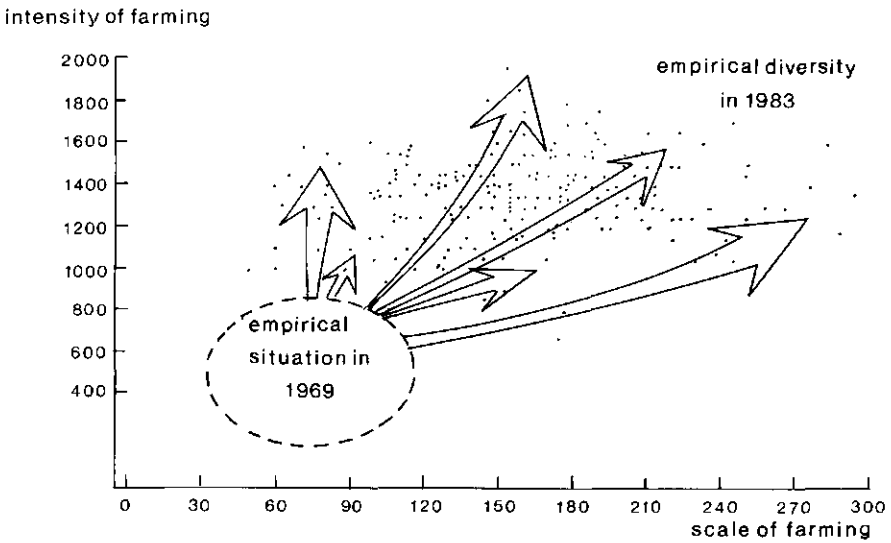


Figure 3 Modernization as an Historical Process (1969-1983)



The countryside was, in short, to be 'deruralized.' Apparently 'sacred' elements, such as the strong links between a farming family and its land, were to be eliminated. Farming was to become, in short, an integral part of the *systems* called economy and technology. Consequently, the impressive diversity of locally based farming styles (that were documented and analysed by my predecessor, Hofstee, with a scientific *rigour* that still amazes) would disappear and make way for one farming system oriented to and defined by the parameters reigning in the domains of market and technology. The confusing, highly diversified reality of the rural 'still' at a distance from the forces shaping modernity, would therefore be replaced by a new, more homogeneous reality, reflecting the reorientation of farming to the optima entailed in markets and technology.

From a more analytical point of view we can understand the 'deruralization' implied by the modernization project as bringing about a range of mutually interlinked *disconnections*. In the first place, the very nature of co-production was redebated and, to a considerable degree, thrown into disequilibrium. Farming was increasingly disconnected from the local eco-system, with which it had interacted for so many centuries. The far-reaching reorganization of time and space was intended to artificialize and to globalize farming and, consequently, nature too. Second, the modernization project contained (and sometimes openly preached) a 'degradation of craft'.³⁵ Whilst agriculture, had been understood since Columella as the 'art of farming,' the modernization project clearly aimed at an increasing *disconnection* between farming and craft. Third, modernization implied an *adieu* to PCP and therefore to the farm family as one of the decisive centres of decision making. Fourth, the disconnections between agriculture and the local eco-system, craft, the farming family and the patterns of cooperation in which it was embedded, also implied an increased distance, if not a complete disconnection between the agricultural process of production and the food produced. The proverbial sprouts might just as well come from a factory (Reuvekamp 1997).

Figure 2 synthesizes some of the technical dimensions of the modernization project. According to the dominant notions of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, the process of modernization was seen as a large and well-coordinated movement through time, that is, as a 'jump' from the past to the future (Rambaud 1983). Agriculture was to be intensified and the scale of farming was to be increased simultaneously.³⁶ Agriculture was 'to move' towards the optimum as entailed in markets and technology. At the same time, locally inspired diversity (such as that expressed in initial differences in intensity and scale) would be banished through convergence produced through reorientation along global parameters. Variety could not be anything other than a remnant of the past.

The modernization project, which increasingly informed and penetrated all dimensions of agricultural policy, deeply affected both agriculture and the countryside. The two were literally reshaped: time and space as

organizational dimensions of the rural obtained a completely new look. *Nonetheless, the rural as such did not disappear.* Instead, rurality as co-production as well as the central mechanisms in which co-production is grounded, were reproduced if not strengthened. One way to illustrate this is to analyse, in retrospect, empirical farm development patterns as realized between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1980s (see Figure 3).

Figure 3³⁷ makes it clear that farmers *deconstructed* in practice the homogenizing tendencies of the modernization project to a considerable degree. A process of increased differentiation emerged (see Long and van der Ploeg 1989, for a theoretical elaboration of this phenomenon) from the encounter between an increasingly centralized and prescriptive policy, uniformed markets and a standardized supply of technologies, on the one hand, and different farming strategies, on the other. The room for manoeuvre (see PCP) created by farmers and their craft, that is, the capacity to mould the process of production and technologies in specific and mutually differentiated ways was crucial to this process.

It is, in retrospect, clear that the creation of the 'disconnections' discussed earlier, has been only partially successful. The rural proved to be more 'stubborn' than many social scientists of those times had assumed. On the one hand, one can conclude that those farming styles embodying a high degree of disconnectedness hardly function any better technically or economically than the those containing a high degree of 'localness' (being linked to local resources, such as the local eco-system, labour, specific end-products and/or the local cultural repertoire). On the other hand, society as a whole is reacting: the more food-production becomes 'industrialized' – that is disconnected from craft and local eco-systems – the more widespread the demand for *genuine* food. The more landscapes (and the embedded natural values) are literally 'removed' to make room for industrialized agriculture, the more there is a generalized demand for nature- and landscape preservation. And one could continue discussing all the interrelations linking the rural and the urban.

The socio-political movement towards more *democracy* that deeply affected western Europe in this period has had far-reaching consequences for the increased differentiation illustrated in Figure 3. Although we have scarcely begun to inquire into the possible interlinkages between the two, it is quite clear that they are interrelated in several ways. One very important interlinkage is farmers' struggle for local self-regulation (Hees *et al.* 1994), which gave birth to a new arrangement, nowadays known as the environmental cooperative. Another interlinkage, which I will briefly discuss here, concerns the gender dimension.

Rural women have played an important role in constituting the heterogeneity we currently witness in agriculture. As the studies of de Rooij (1992) and de Rooij, Brouwer and Broekhuizen (1995) make clear, an increased involvement of women in work and decision making results in

quite different farming styles. The same has been demonstrated by van der Plas and Fonte (1994) for Europe as a whole. In research by Bock (forthcoming), this feature has again been emphasized in relation to women's role in new processes and forms of rural development. As she demonstrates, it is the more emancipated women who make the difference.

The same interrelation between democratization and gender equality, on the one hand, and rural development, on the other, can be seen at the international level. Widespread land reforms in Latin America gave rise to a massive and self-conscious *campesinado*. The collapse of state socialism in eastern Europe made visible the *MIR reality* that had supposedly been swept away by the eradication of the peasant. Massive repeasantization has been triggered off in some parts of eastern Europe. Rural development and democratization are, in short, intimately interwoven; not only in the period analysed by Slicher van Bath (1978), but also today (Mamdani 1987; Matlhape and Munz 1991).

The Ongoing Misunderstanding of the Rural

There is no single set of relations that links the urban and the rural. Athens and Greek civilization produced petty commodity production, whilst Rome gave the world large-scale, slave-based agriculture and much later *l'arte dell'agricoltura*: the art of farming (Columella 1977). Each location and each epoch produces its own town-country interrelationship, reflecting both the imprint of the past and containing specific prospects and perspectives for the future. The *complaints and lamentations*, sometimes misunderstood and seen as a kind of fatalism inherent in peasant culture, reveal in my opinion what are felt to be *blocked* prospects and perspectives. The complaints, therefore, often contain the seeds of change. The *mezzadro* from Bertolucci's *Novecento* who, in front of the landlord, cuts off his own ear is not just lamenting, he is criticizing. It is a dramatic, down-to-earth, and consequently very rural form of protest and critique. The man uses his own body, the last resource, we might say, to express this critique; and precisely because he uses his 'own body,' a way out can be created as well. This happens in a later scene when the same old and ugly *mezzadro* takes a flute to inspire the others, just as in *Grapes of Wrath* a tired and worn-out mother, who has just lost her child, offers her breast to one of the starving men, in an attempt to help him survive (Steinbeck 1991). It is an *archetype* for the rural, in which exploitation, sacrifice, resistance and revival are intimately linked.

One of the most beautiful illustrations of blocked prospects and perspectives is found in Cobbett's *Rural Rides* (1973, p. 32), in which the author relates an encounter with a farmer returning home after a hard day's work in the fields. The man was asked how things were going. 'Very bad,' he replies, 'the weather is very bad.' Confronted with the

fact that the weather had been beautiful and the harvest plentiful, the farmer continues: 'Yes, that is exactly the reason, because *they* [that is: the others, jd] turn all that into something very bad for the poor!'

Town and countryside, the rural and the urban are not only linked, that is combined and opposed, at the material level but also at the symbolic level. Although the frames of reference seem at first sight to describe the other side of the town–countryside equation, it is exactly the other way around at a deeper level of analysis. Through images used to describe the countryside, urban culture provides information about itself. When the towns are felt to be ugly places, the rural is 'pastoralized,' if not reified. And when the town is seen as a fountain of change, progress and dynamism, the countryside is depicted as a place of stagnation and the peasant or farmer as a laggard.

Times are a'changing and so the rural goes on changing too. Another change occurs in the ways in which the 'urban' knows the rural. If we focus on recent decades, some major changes can be identified. Some forty years ago, nearly everybody in the cities – at least in northwestern Europe – was linked through kinship relations to farming families. Many people had spent holidays on some farm during their youth and, with passing years, this spot had been transformed into an idyll. When memory becomes the vehicle for knowing the rural, the reencounter with the concrete manifestations of rurality cannot but produce an image of '*Paradise lost*.' Compare any document describing agriculture as it was several decades ago,³⁸ with current impressions and it will inevitably appear that the rural has indeed changed drastically. Or that, as is increasingly concluded, 'the rural is disappearing.'

Any such conclusion is, of course, superficially right but essentially wrong. It is a conclusion based on *changing outlook*, not on the essence of rurality. It reflects the city's *malheur* with its own inconveniences and its associated longing for something totally different, that is, 'pure nature.' It is telling that the wish to rebalance the rural as a co-production of man and nature in favour of 'nature,' stems from the cities.

The 'city' (understood as a metaphor referring to a range of typical urban interests) is increasingly unable to understand the rural. This is basically due to the fact that the city knows the countryside through the 'past' or through the 'future.'³⁹ Hence, the images associated with the rural 'as it used to be,' and/or with the rural 'as it ought to be,' are central to the urban-inspired representation of the rural. Consequently, the rural *as it is* emerges as a denial, or an ugly deviation, from one of two opposite poles.⁴⁰

The images of the rural as-it-was and of the rural as-it-needs-to-be are not outside history, but rather coterminous with the rural itself. The more the rural moves (and changes), the more the development of these two counter-images of the rural also accelerate. The changing rural and the

consequent misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the rural are, therefore, two sides of the same coin.

Why is it that the rural-as-it-is, cannot be understood from the city? This is basically due to a relative lack of the mechanisms through which rurality is produced, not absolutely, but relatively, in the urban context. Since the city is unfamiliar with these mechanisms (the urban was constituted through their *denial*), it can never come at grips with the rural as-it-is. 'East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet.'

The Future of Rural Development

The more our world becomes urbanized, the greater the need for rurality will be (Simmons 1996). It therefore comes as no surprise that the issue of 'rural development' is on the agenda again. It is even less surprising that this issue is discussed in terms of strengthening an important part of our cultural capital (Delors 1994; Saraceno 1996a).

The drive towards deruralization as reflected, for example, in the modernization project of recent years, has run aground on the boundaries and problems created by that project itself. Consequently, society as a whole articulates towards the rural a range of needs and expectations that were once self-evident, but which have become increasingly marginalized in the course of the modernization trajectory. Simultaneously, parts of the rural increasingly address these needs – even before such a redress appeared on various political agendas. The associated rural development practices *avant la lettre* reflect the many testimonies to agency as embedded in the countryside.

In the years to come we will probably notice a *reruralization*: a reemergence of the rural as an indispensable part of our civilization. Human capital, that is the capacity to handle craft and PCP to address societies' new needs,⁴¹ will be decisive in this respect. Changing values in the political culture of agriculture (Nooij 1993) underpin this possibility (van Aartsen 1995). It is even possible that this same reruralization will bring about some basic changes in tendencies such as the ongoing decrease in agrarian employment levels. As we have discussed elsewhere, an increase in quantity and quality of farmers' labour is not beyond the realms of possibility. Whether this will ultimately occur depends on agency as entailed in the rural itself. Even if rurality is a constant through time, its concrete future remains unsure. The specifics of rurality remain largely unknown as does the form it can be expected to take in the future. Perhaps that is one of the charms of rurality.

Notes

- 1 The recent Cork Conference on Rural development was especially interesting. See Cork Declaration (1996), Fischler (1996), Mannion (1996), Saraceno (1996a) and Simmons (1996). The discussions and conclusions of the Cork Conference are evidently rooted in previous debates. See, in that respect, Delors (1994) and van Depoele (1996).
- 2 As far as the Netherlands are concerned, we can refer to the Policy Statement of the Minister of Agriculture, Nature Conservation and Fisheries known as *Dynamiek en Vernieuwing* (Dynamics and innovation) See van Aartsen (1995).
- 3 The emergence of the 'rural development' option at the EU level is evidently related to the crisis of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), with the negotiations that are to take place in the second GATT round, as well as with the discussions over the integration of an increasing number of central and eastern European countries into the Common Market. The discussion on 'rural development,' however, goes well beyond the practicalities of the indicated fields of interests.
- 4 For a modest and far from complete overview, we might refer to the EU debate on 'rural development,' organized by the former EU president Jacques Delors (see Delors 1994); to the Cork conference on 'Rural Development' in the preparation of which staff members played a role (see note 1); to the development of *milieu-coöperaties* (environmental cooperatives) in the Netherlands (Hees, Renting and de Rooy 1994), to the practical involvement in the elaboration of solutions for acute conflicts in the countryside (van Egmond, Koopmans and van der Ploeg 1996; Nijhoff, van der Ploeg and Zijlstra 1996); to involvement in the national debate on agro-environmental problems and conflicts (Frouws 1994); to the debate on the role of traditions (de Haan 1996), and to the involvement in the National Debate on Agriculture that was organized in 1994 and 1995 (van der Ploeg *et al.* 1994; Ettema *et al.* 1994, 1995; and, in more general terms: Broekhuizen and van der Ploeg 1995). This involvement is not to be understood as a random phenomenon – it is instead one of the central methodological principles of the Wageningen approach. Special mention is to be made of a recent NRLO study (NRLO 1997), that highlights the contribution and impact of Wageningen sociology to the general debate on rural development.
- 5 Whilst in the prewar period agriculture was definitely the main economic pillar of the rural economy (other economic activities were often highly dependent upon agriculture), from the 1950s onwards, agriculture loses this central position. Many back- and forward linkages are reallocated in the cities and the rural economy is increasingly reorientated to other markets. This 'divorce' of the agricultural and the rural was not matched at the conceptual level: the equation of the rural and the agricultural (an identity that reflected prewar realities) was maintained for too long. When it was finally realized (see also Mormont 1990) that this conceptual identity was increasingly at odds with reality, the first and immediate reaction was and still is to abandon entirely the notion of the rural. Hence, the conceptual hiatus. It was insufficiently recognized that the rural had in the meantime obtained a new essence which, at conceptual level, can easily be reflected and recombined with the agricultural. Further on in this text I will try to develop such a general notion.
- 6 See, for instance, Strijker (1997). The reader is also referred to Huigen (1996), who takes a similar stand. Internationally, this position has already been articulated earlier, for example, by Goodman and Redclift (1986), who portray (according to Marsden, Lowe and Whatmore 1990, p. 11) 'farming as an economically residual, if not archaic category.'
- 7 A recent Dutch Governmental policy document on spatial planning in the coming century notes that 'throughout the country people fear the loss of contrasts between city and countryside, which could result in a 'grey' nation' (VROM 1996, p. 8).
- 8 During the 1970s and 1980s rural sociology experienced a worldwide crisis and loss of identity. This was strongly related to what was then already felt as the 'disappearance of the rural.' Long (1985) argued: 'rural sociology has . . . lost the grounds for claiming to be a distinctive discipline with its own special object of investigation and mode of

explanation' (p. 721 italics added). The lack of a theoretically grounded delineation of the object of rural sociology ('what is the specificity of agriculture and the countryside') had a prominent place in Long's critique: 'Whereas the early tradition had assumed that there was something especially distinctive about rural locations which made them socially and culturally different from urban forms of social life, researchers increasingly took the view that rural locations were merely empirical or geographical entities in which one worked. Being 'rural' carried no special theoretical or methodological implications for the research' (ibid, p. 720). The inability to link the 'own field of research' to the 'more general theoretical debates' was considered part of the crisis of rural sociology (ibid, 1985b, p. 720; Newby 1980, 1981; Newby and Buttel 1980). De Haan and Nooij developed a similar critique in Wageningen, noting at the same time that 'the crisis and stagnation . . . in rural sociology in the seventies' could be interpreted as a 'side-effect of the important process of reconceptualization taking place within various branches of the field' (1985, p. 51). As I have noted elsewhere (van der Ploeg 1995b), rural sociology in the 1990s is going beyond the impasse of the 1970s and 1980s. This is particularly true of the Wageningen branch of rural sociology. There have been important 'reconceptualizations' within the discipline itself. Rural sociological research has regained its own well-recognized place on the research agendas relating to agriculture and the countryside – both within the Netherlands and at European level. The theoretical contributions of rural sociology to social science in general, as well as to agricultural sciences, are now seen as self-evident (see Buttel 1994; Goodman and Watts 1994; and Portela 1994). All this, I would argue, is related to the rediscovery of rurality.

- 9 The problem with the 'objectified categories' indicated is that they create endless contradictions when applied in a dynamic analysis. If people are attracted by rurality and decide to live in the countryside, than the countryside stops being rural because a certain demographic level is breached. The same goes for comparative analysis: bringing rural Java and Scotland into one and the same comparative analysis creates Gordian knots that are impossible to untie. More generally, I am trying to go beyond both the 'functionalist approach' to rurality, in which population density remains the defining cornerstone (e.g., Cloke and Park 1985, p. 13) and the 'pragmatic approach,' in which the countryside is simply identical to the non-urban (e.g., Cloke and Thrift 1994). What I propose, then, is a constructivist approach.
- 10 The countryside is becoming increasingly populated by people who work(ed) in the cities but prefer to live in the countryside. Kayser (1990, 1995), a French rural sociologist, terms this *repeuplement*. Several observers interpret this same phenomenon as indicating an irreversible 'urbanization' of the countryside. I guess that such an interpretation is wrong. This 'urban exodus,' to paraphrase a well-known expression, is not to be understood as the simple expansion of the city. It is exactly the opposite: it is *adieu* to the city as a locus of consumption. It represents a positive choice for the countryside as a place for housing, living, relating to others and relaxing. It is, in short, the attractiveness of the rural that makes for this demographic shift. It would be ludicrous to conclude from the resulting increase in demographic density, that the loci concerned stop being rural. The difficulties produced by such criteria in any comparative approach have been convincingly documented by Kulczar *et al.* (1996), who showed that by applying OECD criteria to Hungary, the whole country emerged as 'rural.' The same lunacy occurs in the exclusive reference to decreasing numbers of agricultural enterprises. Although the green space continues to be used mainly by agriculture, a decrease in the *number* of farms is for observers, such as Strijker, reason to observe a 'deruralization' and/or a 'deagrarianization.' It remains absolutely unclear why such a tendency could not be observed in the 1950s or, for example, during the Great Depression when the plague ravaged the countryside. Apart from that, Strijker *e tutti quanti* absolutely miss the dominant feature: the interwovenness of urban and rural economies which strengthens the specificity of the rural. The absolute apex is reached when the quantitative distribution of services over the territory is used as an indicator for rurality. As somebody once

commented: 'as long as they keep shitting in barrels, it is rural, but as soon as they change to water-closets their world undergoes a paradigm shift.'

- 11 It is remarkable that nature movements in Europe as a whole identify very much with nature and landscapes produced by farming communities, stressing the cultural history and frequently liaising with farmers unions. The tendency in the Netherlands goes partly in the opposite direction: the more 'radical' part of the nature movement explicitly denies the (potential) value of the rural. Strict and exclusive preference is given to 'nature unaffected by man.' This point of view implies indeed that the rural is to be expropriated in order to create room for nature or wilderness. This can only provoke strong resistance, as we have been witnessing in the Netherlands. Apart from that, the radical wing's understanding of nature is quite idyllic, that is, poor and a-historical.
- 12 This is underpinned by negative experiences related to the marginalization of farming in vulnerable areas. Wherever this phenomenon occurred in Europe, there emerged a definitive loss of rurality as well as a degradation of nature, according to the current social definitions of nature. Wilderness is also out of the reach of these social definitions; nature entails biodiversity. It is embedded in beautiful landscapes, accessible in order to be admired. That is, nature as it is socially defined, is definitely part of the rural. Only in the definition of ecologists is wilderness reconceptualized as 'nature.'
- 13 The concept of 'co-production' is derived from the vocabulary developed in the school of social constructivism. The term co-evolution is also frequently used. See Bijker (1993, p. 125); Callon (1986, p. 20); (Latour 1991, p. 22); Latour (1994, p. 64) and Lente (1994, p. 178). Interesting applications within the realm of rural sociology and economy are found in the work of Sevilla Guzman and Gonzalez (1990), Iacoponi (1996) and Brunori (1994).
- 14 I am using 'man' here as a metaphor for society, especially for that part of society that is involved in the indicated co-production. It goes without saying that this latter part is equally effected and conditioned by the larger society to which it belongs.
- 15 This contradiction between the rural and 'pure nature' is reflected in the growing pressure from nature movements (as Natuurmonumenten, World Life Fund, some of the provincial Landscape Unions, etc.) to expropriate *de facto* the rural in order to convert it into 'pure nature.' On the other hand it is increasingly recognized in society at large that interest in nature as articulated by different social groups implies nature-as-result of co-production rather than the stone age fiction expressed by the nature movements concerned.
- 16 Of course, this notion has never been absent in writings and reflections on agriculture. Carena for instance, in his beautiful introduction to the 1977 edition of the *Columella* notes that 'il mondo della campagna contiene già molte, se non tutte le contraddizioni della società o, più in generale, del rapporto dell'uomo con l'ambiente' (1977, p. ix; italics added). Carena also refers to Huggett (1975, pp. 154–156) who observed that the notion of co-production emerged ('blossomed') especially when the distance between town and countryside was enlarged.
- 17 It is telling that in some of the 'hot spots' within the Netherlands (e.g., Gaasterland and de Peel), it is precisely the rural dwellers who oppose the conversion of the rural into what they perceive as 'wilderness.' In de Peel, for instance, farmers reluctantly agreed to a conversion of their lands into *hoogveen*, (due mainly to the very high compensation they were offered), but then rural dwellers did not accept the proposed conversion at all. One telling comment was: 'I choose to live here because there are cows in the meadows, there is activity and life . . . I definitely do not want to live in a world of dead peat.' Rurality, understood as co-production, represents a definite value for rural dwellers.
- 18 The genetic selection and improvement of plant varieties and/or of cattle depends critically on the availability of variation and on the capacity to 'master' it. Farmers have been doing this for centuries. Dutch farmers' study groups and the widespread use of farm accountancy records for comparative use, are recent examples of this mechanism. See Knorr-Cetina (1996), Leeuwis (1993) and Vijverberg (1996) for a discussion.

- 19 Not only from a productivist point of view, or as far as the economy of the individual enterprises is concerned. It also applies to the sectoral and the macro levels. It obviously depends on conjunctural reasoning whether a high employment level in agriculture is perceived as a positive or as a negative phenomenon. Nonetheless, in today's world, in which the West, the Third World and the former Soviet bloc are all confronted with the urgent need to create more employment, one could argue that peasant and farmers' agriculture is superior to capitalist farming. The latter however is rapidly expanding, especially within the Third World, where western enterprises find the 'room' to do so.
- 20 It is telling and intriguing that *artists* such as Felius (1996) and van Zomeren (1995), are needed to express the beauty entailed in co-production.
- 21 These folk-concepts refer to particular farming styles in the dairy farming sector in the Netherlands; see de Bruin (1997), Kerkhove (1994) Leeuwis (1989), Long and van der Ploeg (1994), Roep *et al.* (1991) and Wiskerke (1997). The similarity with 'management styles' as documented in other parts of the world is striking, as can be derived from a comparison with the work of Bennett (1981), Barlett (1993) and Manolescu (1987). There is, however, a difference between these works and the Dutch studies on farming styles. The latter pay much attention to the differentiated technicalities of farming, that is, to the 'non-human' in its association and interaction with the 'human.'
- 22 The story can of course also be told the other way around: the fields, cows, buildings and machinery of the 'machine men' are moulded and combined in such a way that they only allow for practices characteristic of this farming style. A 'cowman' could hardly operate in his preferred way on such a farm.
- 23 Essential to SCP is the conversion of commodities (obtained on input markets) into other commodities (to be sold on the output markets) using labour force which is non-commoditized. Applied to farming, this implies that family labour is the labour characteristic for the 'family farm.' The other resources are mobilized on the markets. In contrast, PCP involves not only labour, but also (a considerable part, if not all of) land, capital and 'non-factor inputs' are owned and controlled by the farming family (or community). Not only labour, but most or all relevant resources are *non-commoditized* and hence used and regulated with *non-commodity mechanisms and circuits* (see Friedmann 1980, 1981, 1986). A relatively autonomous and historically guaranteed reproduction is, therefore, crucial (see, for a further discussion, Long *et al.* 1986; van der Ploeg 1990 and, especially, Saccomandi 1991). In most literature PCP is associated with the past and/or with remoteness (see Bernstein 1977). PCP should be typical for the peasant, whilst SCP, it is assumed, is the typical condition for the farmer. The transformation from PCP to SCP, then, is understood as being typical for the transition from a (partly) natural economy to a 'fully commoditized economy' (Bernstein 1977; see also MacEwan-Scott 1986). This assumption (or representation) is, I believe, basically wrong. It does not help us to understand current peasant and farmers' struggles, nor does it allow for the elaboration of any practical contribution to these struggles. Finally, it might be useful to refer to the difference between SCP and PCP, on the one hand, and Capitalist Commodity Production (CCP) on the other. The more so, since CCP remains an important phenomenon, especially in South American agriculture. CCP is production oriented at the creation of surplus-value. Only those commodities are produced that entail surplus-value (for the one controlling the process of production). This can only be done by using labour force as a commodity. Hence, in CCP all resources enter the process of production as commodities. In SCP the same applies with one important exception: that is, the labour force. In PCP it is not only labour, but also a range of other resources that enter the process of production as non-commodities.
- 24 Strijker, for instance, refers to the relatively modest contribution of agriculture to the rural economy as far as investments, employment and income are concerned. According to his analysis, agriculture accounts at most for some 25 percent of the indicated aspects. Beyond that, he analysed some five small villages, indicating that only a minority of all inhabitants had some relation with agricultural activities. The problem with this analysis is that these

- data are very much taken at face value. It is not clear whether or not they represent a relative or absolute decline. But even when we assume that they are indicative of an absolute and a relative decline, the question remains whether these quantitative changes refer to any qualitative transformation whatsoever.
- 25 This labour-driven intensification contrasts strongly with the technology-driven intensification that characterizes agriculture from the 1960s onwards. Part of the latter model is the increasing dependence on inputs that embody productivity rises. See, for a further discussion, van der Ploeg (1987) and for a critique Vijverberg (1996).
 - 26 Technically speaking, the Dutch agricultural sector has had a negative net profit over the years (a negative *netto bedrijfsresultaat*).
 - 27 Currently we define a farming style on different, but interlinked levels. A farming style, is, in the first place, an interlinked set of values, norms and experiences that concern the way farming is to be organized; in that sense it contains cultural repertoire. This repertoire is actively shared and further developed within specific networks. Second, a farming style contains a specific practice, a specific organization of fields, byre, machinery and especially of the labour process. This specific practice (and all the technicalities and interrelations that are relevant to it) is informed by the strategic notions or cultural repertoire already mentioned. Hence, a farming style also represents a specific unity of 'mental' and 'manual labour.' Third, a farming style also entails the specific interrelations between the farm unit and the surrounding markets and technology supply: that is, those relations needed to realize the specific practice which is at the core of every style. Hence, a farming style not only concerns 'internal' relations, it also involves a (deliberately structured) set of 'external relations.' In the fourth place, we can refer to the fact that markets and technology are not disembodied entities. They are crucial dimensions through which a considerable part of agrarian policy is effectuated. Hence, different positions defined within the room for manoeuvre created by markets and technology, can be understood as well as many positions *vis-à-vis* (or responses to) agrarian policy.
 - 28 The newly emerging tradition of neo-institutional economics in particular has made all kinds of mechanisms that govern non-commodity circuits visible and transparent. The key concept in this approach is 'transaction costs.' See, for a further discussion and application, van der Ploeg and Saccomandi (1995).
 - 29 A significant difference is that in Wageningen research reference is made to *empirical* constellations. Consequently, the notions of *systemness* and *relative autonomy* (Gouldner 1970) emerge as key issues: to what degree does the real world function as a system?
 - 30 This also explains why so many intervention strategies produce unintended consequences. See, for a further discussion, Knorr-Cetina (1981), and Long and van der Ploeg (1989).
 - 31 Lowe *et al.* (1995) rightly stress the centrality of the control issue.
 - 32 See Vacca (1989), for a similar reasoning regarding the industrial sector. The methodological framework developed by Knorr-Cetina (1981) remains a useful tool for understanding the complex interrelations of the global and the local (see for a brilliant discussion: Brunori 1994). A more substantial approach (that builds on the work of Knorr-Cetina as well as on new empirical insights in the complex and contradictory nature of the encounter between the global and the local), is presented in Long and van der Ploeg (1994).
 - 33 The intellectual roots of this project go back probably to the 1930s, when agriculture was reconceptualized from being a specific encounter between man and nature, into the 'unfolding of the laws' that govern nature as understood by biologists, chemists, and physicians. See, for a further discussion, van der Ploeg (1987), Leeuwis (1993) and Vijverberg (1996).
 - 34 The number of visits to a Chinese restaurant became one of the indicators by which to measure the 'modernity' of farmers.
 - 35 I am paraphrasing here the subtitle of Harry Braverman's well known work, *Labour and Monopoly Capital: the Degradation of Work*.

- 36 It was also assumed that farms would further specialize and be completely integrated in agro-industrial chains. It was assumed that the farmer (there was no 'she' in those days) would become an 'early innovator' as well as a 'good entrepreneur.'
- 37 Based on LEI farm accountancy data. See also van der Ploeg (1987) and de Bruin (1997).
- 38 There are, indeed, beautiful illustrations such as those by Uilkema (1995), Magi (1982), van den Driest (1983), the pencil-drawings by van Gogh (see Hulsker 1978); but also written documents, such as those by Mak (1996).
- 39 Particularly those more specific urban interests directly linked to agriculture and the countryside, such as agribusiness and agrarian sciences, articulate the 'future': an image of the rural as it ought to be. That evidently relates to the issue of control and the associated struggle about the (re)distribution of the wealth produced in the countryside.
- 40 An intriguing difference between these two opposite images is that the notion of agriculture-as-it-ought-to-be is very often used (at least in Europe) to refer to US agriculture as a guiding image and a fountain for inspiration. The image of agriculture-as-it-used-to-be reference, by contrast, refers to the same location some decades ago.
- 41 Such as the need for high quality; region specific produce; agro-touristic facilities (Te Kloeze 1990; Lengkeek 1994) and landscape preservation and nature management (van Koppen 1995).